THE PORTO RICANS

Commissioner of Labor Tells of Them.

Fair Review of the Situation as It Stands.

Porto Ricans Far Better Off in Hawaii Than They Were at Home.

The Porto Ricans, when they arrived, gave the least promise, either as citizens or as laborers, of any immigrants that ever disembarked at Honolulu. The men had been carelessly recruited at a time when the laboring population of Porto Rico was in a condition of acute distress. It is probable that few of them were in a physical condition to make a long voyage when they went on shipboard. They were mostly people from the coffee country of their own island, who had been starved out of the mountains when that region was devastated by the hurricane of 1899. This was followed by a year of idlenes, semidependence, and mendicancy in the coast country before they left for Hawaii. They were half starved, anaemic, and, in sime cases, diseased. A considerable number of petty criminals, wharf rats, and prostitutes from Ponce and other coast towns accompanied them. They were not so much representatives of the people of Porto Rico as of famine and misery in the abstract when they arrived in Honolulu. Numbers of men afflicted with hydrocele and others diseases, and who were manifestly incapable of working, found their way among the immigrants. But this was hardly the fault of the Hawaiian planters, who spent nearly $565,000 to get these men, or more than $192 passage money and recruiting expenses for every adult male arriving, and who were practically interested in their physical well-being.

The Porto Ricans appear to have been well treated during their passage from Porto Rico to Hawaii, and to have been provided with as many comforts as are usually enjoyed by voluntary immigrants from Europe to the United States. But their food, while wholesome and abundant, was not always the kind to which they were accustomed, and they had been made ravenous by long starvation. The first three expeditions passed through San Francisco in the winter, and, although they were brought across the country by the southern route, the lightly clad members were subjected to the inclemencies of what was to them almost an arctic climate. But there were few deaths among them while en route. The hardships of traveling merely prevented any recuperation from the deplorable physical condition in which they had left their homes. When they reached the plantations where they were to be employed, many—especially of the first expeditions, which arrived in the worst condition—were taken directly to the hospitals, which some of them never left alive. They did not know how to care for themselves. They had to be taught how to live in their new surroundings. They were morally upset by their long travels and changed environment, and many could not acquire the new habits of life necessary to their new condition. So a considerable number became strollers and vagabonds, and, wherever possible, flocked into the towns.

The social regimen of the islands is strict. There is no extreme poverty, and begging is unknown. Any industrious and able-bodied man can always find employment in the country, and planters act upon the theory that a man who doesn't work is bound to steal. So a person without visible means of support is not allowed to remain on a plantation, and as the plantations cover nearly all the settled portion of the islands, it is exceedingly difficult for a man to follow a life of vagrancy with comfort. A certain number of Asiatics contrive to do so, but they live a sort of parasite existence upon their fellows, visiting from plantation to plantation among their more industrious brothers, and do not sink to the social rank or follow the methods of tramps or public beggars. Therefore Porto Ricans so disposed did not find conditions favorable to the dolce far niente existence so common among their own country population. They were confronted with the necessity of constant labor, and this was a new situation to most of them. A fair number are meeting the emergency with credit, and are acquiring habits of persistent industry that they might never have gained in their own country. But a certain proportion have failed to a adapt themselves to any sort of an industrious life, and these have drifted from the plantations into the towns or their immediate vicinity and form a class of malcontents and petty criminals.

The Porto Ricans arrived in Hawaii in 11 expeditions, beginning in December, 1900, and continuing until October 19, 1901. There were about 450 in each party, the total number of immigrants being about 5,000, of whom 2,930 were men and the remainder women and children. The exact cost of recruiting and bringing them to Honolulu was $564,-191.68, or more than $100 per capita—a sum amply sufficient to assure their comfortable transportation and entertainment while en route.

So far as a personal visit to every plantation in the islands save one (and that a place where no Porto Ricans were or had been employed) was able to show, the planters appear to have fully kept their side of this agreement. In most cases, however, the men have left the plantations originally employing them and wandered from place to place, taking such positions as their fancy or necessity dictated, like other free agricultural laborers. On nearly every plantation they are given in addition to the wages agreed upon in the "contract" a bonus of 50 cents a week for every week in which they work the full six days. They receive special consideration in many ways that is not shown laborers of other nationalities. One plantation employs a physician for Porto Ricans exclusively, others that do not run plantation stores buy rice and similar supplies at wholesale which they sell at cost to these employees; a planter on the island of Hawaii gives his Porto Ricans a sack of flour in addition to their weekly bonus whenever they work a full month of 26 days, and at an another place, where there are nearly 100 employed, they are served with a free luncheon of hard tack and coffee in the field. Among about 100 Porto Ricans interviewed there was not a single man who complained that he had not received full compensation for his services.

The quarters provided for the Porto Ricans were in many cases new and were usually modeled after those supplied the Portuguese, with whom it was assumed they would associate, and were superior to most of those occupied by Asiatics. They were comfortable cottages, equal to the better class of plantation quarters in the South or in Cuba, and considerably superior to the dwellings of the country laborers in Porto Rico. But complaint is made that, compared with other working people in the islands, the habits of the Porto Ricans are untidy, and, as a result, many were transferred to poorer quarters, and Asiatics and other laborers were put in the homes that were originally built for them. In these things they were compared with the tidy Japanese and other Asiatics employed in the islands, who, as well as the native Hawaiians, are clean about their persons, and this fact reacts favorably upon their surroundings, even when they neglect sanitation and orderliness about their houses.

PORTO RICANS UNPOPULAR.

This fact has prejudiced plantation managers and the people of the islands against the Porto Ricans. They are also unpopular on account of the number of criminals who accompanied them. Petty thieving was extremely rare in the country districts of Hawaii previous to their arrival. In this respect the native Hawaiians are almost perfectly honest, unless corrupted by city influences, and the Asiatics and other laborers are not inclined to pilfer from the whites or to commit any lawless acts that will bring them into direct relations with other than their own people. Heretofore doors and windows of private residences have seldom been locked, and small articles of value and other property have been left about uncared for with perfect security. The planters state that the arrival of the Porto Ricans changed all this and bring in support of this statement official statistics which show that the commitments per thousand inhabitants to Oahu Prison, Honolulu, during the first 10 months of 1902 were, for the Japanese, 1.1; Chinese, 3; whites, 5.3; Hawaiians, 6.1; and Porto Ricans, 33.2.

The Porto Ricans, on their part, have not been uniformly contented with the conditions they have encountered in Hawaii. Complaints of ill usage and injustice were made. It was claimed that they were charged exorbitant prices at the plantation stores, and were obliged to be at work at unreasonably early hours. A careful investigation failed to disclose any extortion in the prices charged by the plantation stores or any discrimination as to hours of labor. The cost of living is relatively higher in Hawaii than in Porto Rico, so that prices that seem but normal to those familiar with the islands might well appear exorbitant to the new arrivals. The hours of labor generally observed in Hawaii would naturally seem a hardship to those accustomed to the somewhat easy going Porto Rican methods. Other plantation laborers work rainy days as a matter of course, but over this point considerable trouble with the Porto Ricans in Hawaii occurred. Especially were complaints made by those working in the Hilo and Hamakua districts, and it is in this country that there is the most rainfall. As a result of this climate condition there has been a gradual movement of the Porto Ricans toward the dryer sections of the islands, and in those regions they are more contented and give better satisfaction as laborers. To repeat a statement already made, the industrial regimen of the islands is a strict one. Hawaii is a country where no encouragement is given to idlers. It is probably the most energetic tropical country in the world.

SOME GOOD ONES LEFT.

But the condition of the Porto Ricans in Hawaii has another and a pleasanter side. The hopelessly ill have died, some of the discontented have left for California, and the criminal element has been largely weeded out of the working population in the country. There remains upon the plantations a considerable body of fairly efficient laborers. Representatives of these were interviewed upon all the islands, and without exception they were satisfied with their present condition. There are 539 Porto Rican children in the schools of Hawaii, enjoying educational facilities that are exceedingly rare in their own country. Some of the better educated men are employed in positions of responsibility, as overseers, storekeepers, office men, and mechanics. Intelligent medical treatment, wholesome diet, and steady labor have improved both their physical condition and their morale. They have lost the dejected, drooping walk that characterized them on their arrival, and step out as freely and vigorously as the jaunty little Japanese. Some of them are saving money. One field hand from Peepeekeo plantation left the islands with $250. Another, the head of a family in the Kohala district, has $110 deposited with a physician in Honolulu, and another informed the writer that he and his family were earning $75 a month, besides house, fuel, and medical attendance, and that he "Thanked God he had come to Hawaii." In a number of instances men had smaller sums than those mentioned deposited with their employers.

Many of the Porto Ricans had recourse to Dr. L. C. Alvarez, the Spanish vice-consul in Honolulu, as a friendly adviser during the difficulties and misunderstandings attending their arrival, and have remained in correspondence with him since. He has received complaints of harsh treatment from but 3 of the 55 plantations, and when some rumor was circulated through the islands to the effect that the Washington Government would send a transport to take the men back to Porto Rico some of them wrote to protest against this gross injustice, as they considered it, of being deprived of their present opportunities and forced to return to their own country. Of course many of the men are homesick, and probably a very large majority of them would welcome an opportunity to return to Porto Rico. They suffer from the same nostalgia that affects European immigrants to the United States.

OPINIONS OF MANAGERS.

The opinions of managers as to the efficiency of Porto Rican laborers differ, but most of those interviewed thought that sifted men, who had remained steadily on the plantations, were satisfactory. From 40 to 60 per cent of the laborers originally received were reported good. A few managers, including one or two wth the longest pay rolls in the islands, prefer not to have a Porto Rican in their employ, while others retain in their service all who apply for work. The manager of the Kohala Sugar Company says in his report for 1901: "The Porto Ricans have turned out well and are among the best laborers on the plantation, and are improving greatly."

The annual report of Olaa plantation for the same year contains the following statement by the manager:

"We have on the plantation 237 Porto Ricans, including women and children. Although there is among them a good deal of poor material, the majority of them are fair workers and we have little trouble with them. I think the one prime reason for this is that we have continuously maintained in our employ a thoroughly competent interpreter, so that there has been no misunderstanding between laborers and manager as to what was wanted on either side."

One manager states that the Porto Ricans in his force constantly improve, but that they have to be taught to eat sufficient and wholesome food. Almost the same opinion was recently expressed by a large employer of native labor in Cuba. The manager at Waialua thought the Porto Ricans remaining in his employ were good men, but not equal to the Japanese, while a manager on Kauai and another on Hawaii considered that they accomplished more field work in a day than any Asiatic and nearly as much as a Portuguese or a European. Two cases were actually observed where Porto Rican and Japanese gangs chanced to be working in the same field, in one instance cutting cane and in the other distributing fertilizer, and on both occasions the Porto Ricans were covering ground much faster than the Orientals. There was complaint that Porto Ricans work irregularly, but this is only partially borne out by the figures taken from the books of two large plantations for the months of July and August, 1902. The averages, for men only, are as follows:

Portuguese:	
Average number of men employed.	126
Average days worked per month	22.74
Hawaiians:	
Employed.	32
Days worked.	21.95
Japanese:	
Employed.	664
Days worked	21.34
Porto Ricans:	
Employed.	125
Days worked	20.85
Chinese:	
Employed.	119
Days worked.	20

It should be said of the Chinese, however, that since the exclusion law went into effect with annexation most of the younger and most vigorous workers have gone back to China, leaving behind the gamblers and opium smokers, and those who, on account of age and decrepitude, can not accumulate funds to return to their own country. The best workers among the Chinese are also drafted off to the rice fields by employers of their own nationality, so that altogether only a remnant of the poorest hands remain as day laborers on the plantation. The Porto Ricans are incited to regular work by a special bonus of 50 cents a week for every full week of labor, which inducement is not offered to Asiatics.

There has been practically no change in the number of Porto Ricans working on the plantations during the year 1902, though there was a rapid decrease previous to that time, which would tend to show that after the naturally vagrant and criminal classes were once eliminated the remainder form a reasonably steady class of employees. The figures of the total number, of both sexes, employed at different dates, as given by the Planters' Association, are as follows:

October, 1901	2,085
February, 1902	1,851
September 30, 1902	1,853

Of the 55 plantations in Hawaii, 34 had Porto Ricans on their pay rolls in the autumn of 1902. One thousand seven hundred men, or slightly more than 58 per cent of the whole number of men imported, were then employed, and were earning an average monthly wage, without bonus, of $17.52. Including the weekly bonus of 50 cents paid to a very large majority of them for regular work, their possible wages were nearly $2 a month more than this, and their real monthly earnings probably averaging between $18 and $19. On one plantation, where the actual wages paid 54 Porto Rican employees were averaged for the month of August, 1902, it was found that they earned $18.85 each, or 51 cents a month more than the Japanese. There were also 172 Porto Rican women employed, at an average wage of $11.13 a month, and 164 minors, whose average wages were $10.20. The occupations of the men were distributed as follows: Four held clerical positions, paying an average of $35.32 a month; 11 were overseers, receiving $30.29 a month; 18 mechanics and mechanics' helpers received $21.57; 29 teamsters received $20.61; 15 wharf men received $19.77; 15 railway laborers received $20; 9 mill hands received $18.20; and 1,734 field hands and common laborers received, without including the bonus, an average of $16.13 a month. The average wages of the Porto Ricans employed on the plantations are therefore higher than those promised them when they left Porto Rico. But slightly more than half of those imported still remain in plantation work. Of these 539 are accounted for by the school children, 166 had been committed to Oahu Prison, and the remainng 2,300 represent minors too young to attend school, those employed off of the plantations, and the vagrant and vagabond population that has collected in Honolulu. Some also have died and a few have left for the Coast. Twenty-three Porto Ricans are also engaged in cultivating on contracts, and are earning about $26 a month besides quarters, fuel, and medical attendance. These are not included among the plantation wage earners enumerated above.

From the planters' point of view an important result of the Porto Rican immigration was the moral effect that their arrival had upon the Japanese. The latter had begun to fancy that with the enforcement of the Federal Chinese exclusion and contract laws after annexation they were complete masters of the labor situation in Hawaii. They formed temporary combinations for the purpose of striking at critical periods of the planting and grinding season, and in this way had succeeded in forcing up wages. This is sufficiently shown by the rise in the average wage of field hands from 60 to 76 cents a day, or an increase of over 25 per cent, during the year ending June 30, 1901—the first 12 months following annexation. The regular arrival of monthly expeditions of Porto Rican laboring people throughout an entire year largely disabused them of this sense of monopoly and made them much more reasonable in their relations with their employers.

THE ULTIMATE EFFECT.

The ultimate effect of the Porto Rican immigration upon the islands will probably be unimportant. Those who remain will doubtless amalgamate more or less with the Portuguese during their transition into Hawaiian-Americans. They and their descendants will in all probability be vastly better off than they had any prospect of being in their own country. They have brought with them a criminal element which it may take time to eliminate, but which will find the islands a decidedly discouraging field for operations, and they have faults and weaknesses which it may require a generation or two fully to correct. They are somewhat given to drinking, gambling, and carrying concealed weapons, and are more quarrelsome and vindictive than the other inhabitants. Difficulties sometimes arise between them and the Japanese. The latter are seldom the aggressors and rather fear the Porto Ricans in individual disagreements, but on one or two occasions, when their blood was up, it required prompt and energetic police interference to prevent a sudden extermination of the local Porto Rican population. The customs of the two people are so different that trouble is apt to result if they are placed in neighboring quarters. The Japanese, for instance, have

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